

10 principles for teaching English – what, why and how.

Teaching principle	What	Why	How
1/ Maximise student talking	It can be useful for learners to simply listen to the teacher explaining (this exposes them to language, can help them listen better, allow them an important 'silent period' to try to make sense of sounds and words etc.), but it's probably more useful to get the learners talking as much as possible instead	Low level learners probably won't understand verbal explanation anyway	Get them talking as soon as possible with simple pair or group tasks eg. one points at a picture, the other says the word; one asks for the thing in the picture, the other picks it up
2/ Minimal, simple teacher talk	Grading our language to prioritise basic vocabulary and tenses. The teacher talks as little as possible to allow the students to talk as much as possible. The teacher only says what it is absolutely necessary to say and no more.	To ensure that what all learners understand everything and that there is more time for learners to talk.	Teacher avoids complex tenses, modal verbs, and idiomatic language. She speaks slowly but naturally and prioritises the present simple tense and short sentences with mime and gesture.
3/ Repetition	Students working individually or as a whole class repeat sounds, words, phrases, and sentences after listening to models by the teacher; they can also listen to and repeat after other strong students.	For students to focus on and practise intelligible pronunciation of new language. Repeating also helps memory.	The teacher points to a picture and asks what it is, then models the word naturally and clearly a few times. Students repeat, together or/and alone. The teacher listens and corrects if necessary.

4/ Differentia- tion	<p>Learners are all different, so we need to alter what we do in class to challenge or support them better. For example, we can adapt tasks, give more or less work to some, group or pair learners differently or give learners choices of different activities.</p>	<p>To make sure all learners get the most from the class.</p>	<p>You can set up a speaking task and pair weaker students together and stronger students together; or weak with strong, or by different first language. You can give out a reading text with an easier task for slower readers, and a more challenging task to stronger readers on the same text.</p>
5/ Sensitivity	<p>Teachers need to be sensitive about the topic of the lesson or conversations, understand traumas of the past and present and that certain words or topics can trigger terrible memories. Learners' moods may change suddenly or they may become silent and not want to participate.</p>	<p>People find it more difficult to learn if they are not valued or understood. Learners can put up barriers to learning if they are uncomfortable or stressed.</p>	<p>We need to be flexible, gauge mood and interest, be prepared to drop a task or change subject if necessary, and accept what learners really need to talk about.</p>
6/ Develop study skills	<p>Study skills are how to remember, how to review learning, how to make notes, organise your learning material.</p>	<p>Learners have often missed out on education and need to catch up. If we build study skills into a language course, they can learn all subjects better inside and outside class.</p>	<p>We can build in short tasks eg. pairs testing each other on new words from pictures. We can help learners create their own word books and show them how to cover words and test themselves, or copy out words to learn the spelling.</p>

<p>7/ Relevance</p>	<p>Many ELT coursebooks and materials are written for an international market or particular age groups or types of learner.</p>	<p>Learners learn best when they can see the relevance of a topic and language and they can be actively engaged.</p>	<p>Personalise material if possible. Cover topics with immediate relevance that will be useful, or topics the learners like and are interested in, and language the learners will need to use.</p>
<p>8/ Correction</p>	<p>Learners can often communicate with inaccurate language, or simple words. This is one level of basic communication, but it will be useful to guide them to correct some errors to learn the correct version.</p>	<p>Learners may need to have accurate grammar and pronunciation (eg. to find work) so we will help by guiding them.</p>	<p>It's difficult for learners to focus on how to say something at the same time as what they are saying, so we can note down a few relevant errors and guide learners to correct them after the speaking task. It's always more effective and memorable for teachers to guide learners to correct themselves and each other than to simply provide the correct version.</p>

<p>9/ Review and build</p>	<p>We cannot expect anyone to learn words and grammar simply by seeing them or hearing them once. We need to come back to previous learning to review, revise, practise in different contexts, and then build on what learners already know.</p>	<p>We often need to see and use new language 6 or 7 times before we remember it and can use it naturally. We learn new language by linking it to what we already know.</p>	<p>Ask learners what they have learnt today at the end of the lesson. Start each lesson by reviewing what they learnt the previous lesson. Bring back language they've used before in different contexts, and extend the language to give learners more options.</p>
<p>10/ Meaningful learning in context</p>	<p>Grammar and coursebooks often contain 'decontextualised' language practice, where learners are often just practising the mechanics of language and there is no real meaning to the task. Learners usually learn better when they can relate to the language eg. use it to talk about themselves or something they know.</p>	<p>Learners often find it easy to do a language exercise which has no meaning. However, they might not be able to then apply this language to real contexts. Better to teach and practise language in real meaningful contexts.</p>	<p>Start with the learners and their experience. Help learners to 'personalise' the language and relate it to their own life. For example, instead of talking about a day in the life of an unknown character in a book, talk about what the learners did yesterday.</p>